

Islam
Conf.

Hartford, May 1952

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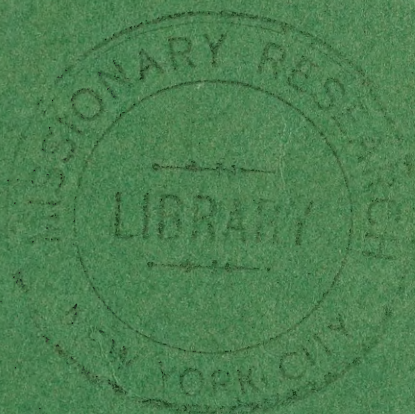
"Islam at Mid-Century"

Report of a Conference
held at
the Hartford Seminary Foundation
May 29th-31st, 1952

and

reprinted from the Supplement
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THE HARTFORD SEMINARY FOUNDATION
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September 25, 1952

The accompanying Report is a Summary of the proceedings of a brief Conference held here in Hartford at the end of May last. It is reprinted, for wider distribution, from the October issue of "The Muslim World" Quarterly - a publication of the Foundation.

We are happy to send you a copy in the belief that you will be interested in its contents, as belonging to one or other of the following groups of people with whom we venture to share it:

- (1) Muslims - students or others - resident in this country who are concerned for a closer relation with Christians and likely to be interested in the positive attempts which Christianity is making to fulfil, as far as it understands them, its contemporary obligations to Islam and the Muslim. The Conference wanted to merit and elicit such interest and to move on from it.
- (2) Christians engaged in study and action in respect of Islam, whether in the overseas missionary enterprise, through religious groups on campuses across the nation, or in the opportunities which come for meeting with Muslims in any other capacity that can become an occasion of Christian interpretation.
- (3) Others - interested in the general problems of the Middle East, Pakistan and the rest of Muslim Asia and Muslim Africa, who realise that the relations of the West, politically and economically, with these areas are also relationships with Islam and that the relevance of Christianity cannot be excluded from the issues attaching to the work of Point Four, or the oil industry, and the like. Indeed many aspects of the human situation which are explicit in the Christian Mission and obligations for it, are implicit in the "secular" relationships and factors that condition them.

The Conference was not an end in itself nor was it in any sense complete. Nor have we any immediate prospect of pursuing its purposes by holding another. This summary, however, is commended to your interest and thought. Further copies can be obtained on request. You may find it possible to go further into your duty, of understanding and witness, towards Islam, if you are a Christian, and of open-hearted serious reckoning with Christianity, if you are a Muslim. Since "The Muslim World" Quarterly is designed to serve both these ends - a Muslim understanding of Christ and a Christian awareness of Islam - may we commend it to your interest and support?

With best wishes,

Yours faithfully,

Kenneth Gass

Editor, and Secretary to the Conference

“ISLAM AT MID-CENTURY”

REPORT OF A STUDY CONFERENCE

May 29th-31st 1952

The Hartford Seminary Foundation

“Ye come not together for the better but for the worse.” So S. Paul wrote to Corinth in a passage which may seem somewhat inappropriate to the introduction of a Conference Report. In any event ours was not a conference of quarrelsome Corinthians, but of sober folk, bent on study not disputation. Yet it is well that we sometimes remember that conferences, like marriages, are “for better or for worse” and that if we meet and discuss and separate with a satisfaction in an occasion only, airing out, but not progressing in, the issues we face, we may actually disserve our purpose. When times are urgent and tasks big, we need to beware lest our own standards of evaluation are too short or too lenient. If these are small when our objectives are large, what can be the benefit? The “worst” of conferences is that they are tempted to look upon themselves as ends instead of means and often conclude when they are only beginning.

Having, however, been honest with the danger we sometimes are to ourselves, let us hasten to add that, by and large, this was a Conference for the better—for the better understanding of the contemporary Muslim world and the better fulfilment of the obligations of the Christian in and to it. It was an attempt to unite in study of Islam as it finds itself in the middle of this bewildering Century and to concert our minds and wills in confronting that situation in terms of the responsibility it places upon Christian truth and love. The residential meeting was made possible by the generosity of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, whose five-year grant-in-aid to the Kennedy School of Missions provided, among other things, for such Area Conferences on the problems of our day. It is hoped that there will be similar Conferences later, on India, Africa and Latin America. For a variety of reasons the Muslim Lands Department was given the first opportunity. It was happy to be able to bring to-

gether a fairly representative group, some forty strong, including missionaries, actual and potential, students of the area in cultural and diplomatic fields, scholars and administrative personnel. Most of the countries of the Near East and also Iran, Pakistan and the Farther East, were represented in some sense. We suffered from the absence of some who could not be present, whose contribution would have been most welcome. There were Muslims as well as Christians in our number. After an initial welcome voiced by the President of the Foundation, Dr. Russell Henry Stafford, we settled down, with the overtones of a severe rain-storm, to the first of the five addresses which made up the planned program. Each address was followed by discussion bearing on its particular theme. There were two further sessions, lasting five hours in all, devoted to a wide review of contemporary Muslim-Christian relations. This provided an unhurried occasion—without prepared papers but against the background of the earlier talks—for a full exchange of thought and view.

(1) THE PRESENT SITUATION IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

(a) Social and Economic Issues in the Middle East.

Mr. Harvey P. Hall, Editor of the *Middle East Journal*, Washington.

Professor Edwin E. Calverley presiding.

It is hardly necessary to emphasize the close inter-action between the economic, social, political and cultural aspects of a community. But it is important to call attention to it when considering attempts to bring advancement to an under-developed society. For it has been abundantly demonstrated that if attention is given, say, to the economic field alone progress will be hampered by the lack of attention to others—for example, the fields of education and health, or the development of a sense of social responsibility. More than that, advancement in one field may actually work to the detriment of others. For example, progress in agricultural techniques without due attention to the conditions of

labor, can aggravate the evils of an already outmoded social structure.

This interaction of all elements in society poses an extremely difficult problem for the Point Four Program or any similar plan for development. The answer obviously lies in a broad approach by which a number of basic problems are attacked simultaneously. This fact has been recognized by the Egyptian Government, whose constant slogan has been a fight against the three recognized enemies: Poverty, Ignorance and Disease. Egypt, indeed, affords an excellent example of the principle of inter-action, because here we find the evils particularly virulent. But whereas, in Egypt, the basic problems and the need for attacking them simultaneously are generally recognized, there is difference of opinion and even opposition when it comes to applying the indicated remedies. Poverty cannot be eased without a fundamental reformation in the land tenure system, but this in turn involves financial interests vested in the social order as well as in the economic. An attack on poverty and ill-health results in a larger population—a problem now very acute in Egypt. In its train comes under-employment (and hence a return to poverty) or unemployment and a drift of the population to the cities. An obvious solution to this new dilemma is the development of urban industry, but this in turn has profound effects on the country's economic and social structure. To complicate further these domestic problems of growth and adjustment in Egypt are several further factors: (1) The country's heavy reliance on a single cash crop, cotton, and therefore its dependence on cotton speculators and world market conditions. This makes for an unhealthy situation in a country seventy per cent of whose population lives at subsistence level. (2) The question of Egypt's political relations with Great Britain and the West, which distracts its attention from domestic problems of development. (3) A popular resistance to change and development, for which Islam must share some of the responsibility.

Similar political and economic issues are present in one form or another in each of the Middle Eastern countries. There is the supply of water and its utilization. It might be

supposed that since this is largely a technical problem it would be readily susceptible of solution. But even here knotty questions arise for which technology has no answer of itself—the international character of some of the waterways and the distribution and apportionment of water once it is provided. Land tenure, too,—considered by many to be the basic socio-economic problem facing the Middle East today—involves many difficult issues. Another item with wide ramifications is the provision of capital—the freeing of timid domestic capital for long-term enterprises and the attraction of an adequate inflow of capital from abroad. In this regard it has to be noted that there are strong religious factors militating against initiative. Domestic capital is timid not only because of the prevailing sense of insecurity, but because of scruples against investment. The Muslim mind has not yet effectively thought out the difference the Qur'an recognizes between profit and interest. Moreover, concentrations of capital in the hands of the land-owning 'aristocracy' delays the growth of an investing 'middle class'. As for foreign capital investment, the deterrents of the political instability are still massive. Recent events in Iran and Egypt can hardly be said to attract the foreign investor. Other needs in this general field are the extension of production to cash crops and industry, with the attendant problems of standardization and marketing, the growth of technical education and the reduction of political tensions, domestic and foreign. All these are part of the picture of social advance in the Middle East, and are dependent in turn on the freeing of the Middle Eastern mind for creative and experimental thinking.

Discussion following Mr. Hall's paper centered mainly around this final point: the relation of the West, politically, and of the Church religiously, to the inner sources and sanctions of desirable social and economic change in the Muslim East. It was argued that backwardness was to be laid entirely at the door of the old "colonialism"—a point of view which is readily understandable but is neither a complete nor a constructive diagnosis. Our concern is rather with the per-

sistence of the problem in the era of independence and with means of serving a solution in the new day. Point Four necessarily came under discussion here as being itself involved in the same dilemma as local pioneers of social betterment through economic change. How are the underlying spiritual conditions and the mental pre-requisites of its success to be compassed by what is a program within a foreign policy? Clearly here is a vital need which can only be served by diplomats who transcend normal diplomacy and by the accredited 'private' ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven.

(2) THE PRESENT SITUATION IN THE MUSLIM WORLD.

(b) The Social Changes and Religion.

President Emeritus Bayard Dodge of Beirut, Lebanon.

Professor Edwin E. Calverley presiding.

During a whole century the Western world has been trying to adapt itself to the machine age, to science and modern technology. The Muslim world has been obliged to adjust itself to these innovations during a single generation. Before the First World War the life of Muslim communities in the Near East was much as it had been from the time of Saladin. Now secularism in commercialized form has come in like a flood. Muslims of the old school are shocked by the freedom and license of modern life. On numerous occasions Muslims parents have begged me to protect their sons from "evil (Christian) influences". On the other hand this "modernism" is leading to extensive legal and social changes. In most Muslim countries the use of the Shari'ah Law has been restricted to the control of questions of personal status, family relationships and the "awqāf." As there are a quarter of a million marriages and nearly seventy thousand divorces every year in Egypt alone, the Shari'ah Law still has a large part to play. It has itself been considerably modified in recent years. Scruples against payment of interest are being slowly overcome, although it is understood that the Saudi Arabian Currency Organisation, lately formed into a na-

tional bank, will not pay interest. Although Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Makhlūf, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, has recently uttered a 'fatwa' opposed to women's suffrage, Turkey and Syria both allowed women to vote at their elections in 1950. The President of the 'Ulemā' of Pakistan has also issued an opinion in favor of women's suffrage.

This emancipation of women is perhaps the most important movement taking place in the world today. In the great cities of the Muslim world it has already revolutionized the life of the rich and it is starting to affect the poorer classes. Two especially important aspects of this change are: (a) The young mothers are much more fitted to mould the minds of their children in the impressionable years. In "An Arab Tells his Story," Edward Atiyah speaks of "illiterate women whose minds encompassed nothing beyond the elementary facts of biological and domestic life—birth, circumcision, marriage, pregnancy, divorce, death, mourning, cooking, personal adornment." What besides superstition and bigotry did these mothers have to pass on to their offspring? Teen age brides knew little of hygiene. A third or more of their babies died in infancy, or, if they lived, were victims of trachoma or other serious disease. Today there is a widespread movement to educate girls, to defer marriage until at least the age of sixteen, and to encourage the idea of equal partnership. The hopeless stagnation of the old harem system is giving way before the desire for progress. (b) Women are being freed for civic and social responsibility in the community and it is becoming possible for them to use their leisure and to bring the gifts which men lack to the service of the community.

Another factor of incalculable importance is the development of technology and mechanisation. During the period of less than four years in which the Marshall Plan operated in Turkey, it provided over \$153,000,000 for economic development. The Export-Import Bank granted \$34,000,000 in loans. As a result coal, iron, copper, chrome and manganese mines, steel mills, hydro-electric plants and factories of many types are being developed in modern Turkey. Harbors are

being modernized. Turkish airways are carrying 75,000 passengers a year. 14,300 miles of state highway, 16,700 miles of provincial road and 94,000 miles of village road are in process of construction. Cotton cultivation has been increased by 36%. Similar sums have been appropriated for development by Turkey itself. \$400,000,000 is assigned to Greece and Turkey under the Mutual Security Act of 1951, with a further \$160,000,000 for Iran and the countries of the southern Near East. The machine age is creating a new 'middle class' of professional men, officials and engineers. Though in progressive spirit this section of the community promises great things, it needs also to beware of a materialistic outlook.

The petroleum industry is, of course, the most conspicuous, almost fantastic, example of industrialisation. Before the petroleum boom, the revenues of Saudi Arabia were about \$16,000,000 per year. Now the royalties from oil alone total over \$100,000,000. Kuwait's oil revenues, if divided among her 150,000 people would mean something like \$2,500 for each family annually. Shaikh 'Alī of Qatār rules 25,000 Bedouin in a land without a city. His oil royalty is already half a million dollars yearly. In these desert lands nomads are learning to drive trucks and handle heavy machinery. They are building homes, wearing modern clothes and accumulating savings in a bank! New refineries are to be built at Aden, Sidon, Cairo and elsewhere. The steady movement for the settlement of nomads in Arabia, Iraq and other areas is of obvious significance. It is made possible by the development, conservation and mechanical pumping of water.

Members of the younger generation are hypnotized by the lure of these material developments. The glories of a future paradise are eclipsed by the marvels which they see before their eyes. The quest of the spiritual is crowded out by the seduction of the material. Instead of praying for rain one sinks a well or dams a river. Aeroplanes, not intercessions, will combat locusts. D.D.T. will be more effective against malaria than a score of recited Suras. There is an

obsession to become rich, regardless of how. Business houses keep two sets of books—one for the tax collector and another for the partners. The fine old sense of honor which distinguished many Muslim merchants is being lost. In the past a good Muslim found prestige in piety and orthodoxy. To-day men want showy houses, large cars, extravagant night clubs. Their wives become the show windows of their prosperity. Religion is no longer the basis of education and of social life, as it used to be. Nationalism is the master of Islam rather than its disciple. State education does not give religion primacy. In the new Syrian primary school curriculum three or four hours a week are assigned to religion, nine to mathematics. In the secondary schools only one hour a week is devoted to religion. In Egypt and Iraq the time is even less. The spread of scientific knowledge tends to make dogma seem superfluous.

On the other hand religious questioning, causing indifference to orthodoxy, sometimes channels itself into active philanthropy, striving to express a religious loyalty through service. There are Muslim societies organizing schools, hospitals, clinics, Red Crescent societies and Boy Scout troops. Governments, too, are giving their interest, revenues and leadership to plans for social welfare. The Shah of Iran, for example, is dividing some of his royal estates into peasant homesteads. Egypt is developing social security. Iraq devoted 50% of her budget in 1950 to agriculture, public health, education and public works, and the Lebanon 40%.

These, then, are the contrasts of the Muslim world to-day. A decay and a breakdown in the old standards of belief and conduct—both for good and ill. The good lies in increasing toleration, freedom, dignity and material happiness. The ill comes from the menace of irreligion, self-seeking and licentiousness. But at least the machine age has made our problems common both in West and East. Let us put aside superiority and mistrust. As partners together may we all, Muslims and Christians together, help one another to achieve not only material reconstruction but also spiritual progress which will lead to brotherhood and peace.

(3) TRENDS IN MUSLIM THOUGHT AND FEELING. 1.

Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal.

Professor Malcolm Pitt presiding.

I shall not attempt a descriptive statement nor a geographical survey, but rather an analysis, intended not to seal judgments but to elicit rejoinders. I regard my inability to include Indonesia as a matter of serious apology. For the first point is the possibility that there is, or will be, a shift in the centre of gravity of the Islamic world from the Near East to the Indian ocean. Pakistan and Indonesia are the two largest Muslim countries, and after them India is third, in point of Muslim population. About sixty per cent of the world's Muslims live east of Karachi. There, more than in the Near East except Turkey, Muslims are facing their two chief contemporary problems—the working out of a modern social order and the learning of the art of co-operative living in our shrinking world.

Islam is a religion, and, like all great faiths, quite literally infinite. It is the point at which its adherents are in touch with the infinitude of the Divine. Like each religion, it is, in some senses, all things to all men. In addition to what it is by definition, there is what it is in fact in every individual case. When we say Islam is such and such, we must remember that it is also the personal religious life, shallow or deep, distorted or magnificent, saintly or sinful, of every individual Muslim.

When we consider, as we must, the impersonal thing abstracted from its living adherents, we could define Islam as an organized effort to do God's will, based on revelation as to what that will is. Hence the community is integral to the religion. Islam has from the beginning been a social Gospel. It is a revelation of how men ought to live together. The laws and structure of Muslim society are based, through the Qur'an, on the eternal laws of God. The Islamic community is, for the Muslim, the Kingdom of God on earth. This means that the history of the community is 'sacred'. It is

not merely the record of how Muslims have lived: it is the illustration of how God intended that they should live.

Here we come upon the kernel of the modern Muslims' discomfiture—the burden of a recent history which seemed to have let them down, of a weakness in the world which did not coincide with the 'truth' about Islam. The once successful enterprise for the redemption of mankind through its Islamization seemed to have halted and lagged. Peoples living in other than the Islamic way had been allowed to become more powerful and more successful. There was one comparable medieval set-back, ending the Arab Empire and the first social creation of Islam, namely, the Mongol invasions. Islam survived that 'defeat' through the energies of Sufism and by the conversion of its conquerors. In other hands than those of the Arabs the Muslim historical destiny was resumed, in the brilliance of the 16th and 17th centuries. But how will the second, the contemporary, crisis be surmounted? It is not ours to prophesy. What is clear is that it is the endeavor to rehabilitate its on-going history which is the fundamental fact of present-day Islam. Muslims wish to re-instate Islamic history in its true, Divinely-ordained, function, and to do so through their own efforts. This is, so to speak, the theological imperative within current Islamic social reform. It has two sides—the community's external relations and its internal order. Islam being what it is, Muslims feel they must solve the problem or perish. It is not only the welfare of their community which is at stake but the validity of their faith.

Muslim intellectual leadership is alert to these needs. It has not yet worked out satisfactorily an intellectual or a practical formulation in which to integrate dynamic growth and Islamic theology and law. Theology in Islam has always been at heart apologetic; that is, its role has been to defend the faith—and to do so in practical terms. This apologetic is not only a thing of words, but of deeds. Pakistan for example is an act of practical apologetic—an endeavour to show, both to Muslims and to the world, that the Islamic way is the best way. The way of words leads on occasion to unbridled

romanticism, but the way of deeds is more disciplined. One has a right to ask for intellectual honesty in apology but we should beware of expecting in Islam an exalted intellectualism, like that, say, of the Greeks. The striking thing about contemporary Islam is the will to effect this active re-exemplification of the Islamic way as the good way. Their very perplexity in the endeavour is a measure of their maturity and sincerity. I submit, perhaps provocatively, that in their task they have a profound willingness to learn—not merely technology, but the deep things of the spirit, the will and nature of God.

Politically, it is true, they wish to be left alone. The effort to shake off old domination still pre-occupies. Yet we and they live in a day when civilizations are inter-penetrating. Since we are being more and more thrown together they and we have somehow to evolve the new ingredient of compatibility. This learning to get along with other peoples is one of the chief contemporary problems. We in the West face it—not least in theology. The Church has never yet seriously considered the challenge represented by the faiths of other people. This is the call of the 20th Century, no less than Greek thought was the challenge of the first centuries and science the challenge of the 19th. A positive facing on our part of this summons could greatly help Muslims for their part to face it also.

From this point of view, the creativity of Pakistan was also destructive. For as an act of insistence that Islamic history can proceed only with Muslims in control it greatly disserved the need to learn compatibility and left the Muslims of India bewildered. All this, however, is not yet much on the mind of Muslims. What of ourselves? How little real communication there is between us and them. How bitter is their sense of being misunderstood; Western misconceptions on the top of Western misdeeds. How often we have failed their faith in liberalism and hindered its enlargement. Despite appearances to the contrary, I believe that the Muslim world, aware of its new and almost overwhelming problems of modernity, is looking for friendship from Christians. On the whole I believe that the Muslim world is very sub-

stantially more ready to seek that friendship than the Christian world is to give it. But it is a willingness to learn which is masked behind the search for friendship, the search for someone they can trust. Whom in the world today can they trust? I wish I could say: "The Christians". My submission is that the Muslims also wish that they could say it too.

(4) TRENDS IN MUSLIM THOUGHT AND FEELING. II.

Professor Edward J. Jurji, Princeton Theological Seminary.

Professor Malcolm Pitt presiding.

Were the Christian able adequately to grasp the true genius of Islam and were the Muslim ready to apprehend the ultimacy of Christianity the problem of co-existence would become proportionately easier. In thinking about recent trends in Islamic thought and feeling, one needs to bear in mind the fact that Islam successfully built a bridge between the East and the West, and that its contemporary pattern is one of a non-technical culture in a world whose over-riding cultural pattern is technical. Hence the pathos of Islamic weakness in contrast to the physically powerful, technological West.

The core of the life, thought and structure of Islam is religious. Therefore only a theological approach will help to set forth the true picture of Islam today. When we contemplate the Muslim world we are impressed with its fluid, and sometimes ambiguous, aspect. Modern Islam maintains in large measure the characteristic self-sufficiency which isolates it from fruitful contact with other faiths and questions the validity of non-Islamic theism. It is marked by the exaltation of a system, a tradition, a heritage, instead of contrition before Allah and penitent acceptance of the comfort which He bestows upon all who will trust in His righteousness. In that sense it is nugatory of the highest insights of Islam itself: it is a casting off of humility and true piety, in a pre-occupation with prestige and community. We cannot but regret the unhappy aspects of Islam symbolized in the exclusively political concerns of the former Grand Mufti of

Palestine, who is by office a high religious personage from whom a more spiritual leadership might have been expected. It is such quality of mind which often makes spiritually abortive the dynamism of Islam. The decline of Sufism from its former splendor has contributed to this situation. We must await a more radical theological self-criticism in Islam and a more creative loyalty to its own vocation of submission to the Lord of the worlds. The weakness of human self-sufficiency and the proneness to "impious piety" is not, of course, limited to Islam. It has marred Western culture also and made inroads within the confines of the Church. It may be studied in relation to Islam in what we will call the "visible" and the "invisible" within Muslim thought. By these terms we mean the features readily discernible to the observer and those which are of the theological essence.

In the first realm, we note the contradiction and the recalcitrance of modern Islam. This contradictory character may be studied in the tension between the secular and the orthodox, between freedom and authority, between integration and fragmentation, between the old faith and the new history. Christians, for their part, share the disadvantages of these same contradictions. But Christian thought is self-critical, whereas Muslims are not currently thinking deeply about these matters. They tend rather to react assertively in face of modern thought. The relation of the present to the past—a problem inseparable from time and change—needs more radical attention than Muslims have yet normally given. Apology has not fully grappled with the relation between the authorities of faith and science, of religion and other truth. The freedom of the individual vis-a-vis the community and freedom of movement of conscience within the community are questions on which much of Islam is still inarticulate.

Behind the recalcitrance of Islam is a complex of repressed and pent-up emotion, which is in part the residue of long hostility between East and West. Hence it can hardly be understood apart from the disloyalties of Christianity. The issue is one that must be faced afresh from both sides—we from ours and they from theirs. It would seem that mod-

ern Muslims have been quite unable as yet to circumvent this historic enmity so as to come to an open-hearted reckoning with the Christian Church. That this is so is fully attested in their thought and literature. There is as yet no Muslim work or writer dealing in any profound or even adequate way with Christianity. Yet from every point of view—exterior and interior—the Christian relations of Islam are one of its most evident obligations. But we must remember too that the generality of Christians have not greatly served the dissipation of this estrangement.

As for the ultimate or the “invisible” realm it may be studied in respect of the Muslim attitude to final reality and to man. Ultimate reality in Islam is Allah. But the conception of Allah restricts the role of supernatural mystery. It is not given to the Muslim believer to approach and to know God in the intimacy and fulness which belong to the believer through Christ. The disavowal of the Incarnation is a deep impoverishment of theology, both intellectual and devotional, even when Muslims, Sufis or otherwise, transcend its limitations. It follows inevitably that the status of man is similarly ambiguous. The true meaning of manhood is shrouded because of the obscuring of the redemptive purpose of God and of the consequent call to human transformation through spiritual renewal. We glimpse this difference in the Muslim and Christian doctrines of man when we remember that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation—disallowed in Islam—is as significant about man in his Godward calling as it is about God in His manward grace.

Faced by this wide divergence between Christianity and Islam, Christian witness in the Muslim world, can achieve intercourse between the two only as a ministering Church gives sympathetic support to an Islamic revival streaming from within that faith. Muslim reformers must be encouraged to work for a spiritual, moral and cultural revival. The Incarnate Lord Who is the truth because He discloses the truth about man’s disorder and God’s purpose to restore man to faith can only be preached in Muslim countries when Christians bear to the Muslims the same love which their Lord bore to them.

(5) THE IMPLICATIONS OF COMMUNISM FOR ISLAM

Mr. Manfred Halpern, of Washington, D. C.

Professor J. Maurice Hohlfeld presiding.

In a paper which may later be available for publication, Mr. Halpern examined the doctrines and objectives of Communism from the point of view of their significance for, and possible appeal to, the peoples of the Muslim world, and discussed the varieties of Muslim reaction, radical and conservative, articulate or implicit, to the tenets of Marxism and Stalinism, in the context of the present needs and temper of the world of Islam.

The foregoing five papers, here briefly summarized, constituted the pre-arranged substance of the Conference. The two final sessions were aimed at a meeting of minds on the supreme question of Christian communication to Islam. How can we enter into fruitful intercourse with Muslims in the present situation: what do we seek to do in and for the world of Islam: how shall we utter the Word we have in trust so that it becomes a veritable word to the heirs of the Qur'an: how may we equip ourselves and those who follow us for this Christian contact of souls which is the indispensable condition of communication: in short, how can we best share the purpose of God and prepare the way of His patience and His glory?

It was explained that the Foundation was concerned in a practical fashion with these questions, as a body responsible for the studies of intending servants of the world Church and as the home of a Quarterly publication devoted to just these topics and intended as a "forum" for their pursuit. Moreover the Conference was one in which the so-called professional missionaries had the opportunity of counsel and criticism from those whose perspectives were political or commercial or academic. Since "the West" was to the average Muslim an undifferentiated quantity, there was need to correct the isolatedly Christian character of some forms of missionary activity. There was even greater need to face the forms of 'secular' relationship with Islam with the urgent

importance of appreciating the total significance of their activities in the Muslim setting. It is only reasonable that the doing should be aware of the undoing, since it is never exempt from it. The non-missionary participants said that to overhear the contemporary mission talk about itself was, to them, one of the chief attractions of the Conference. Their contributions were certainly valued.

The fundamental problem might be described as the tension between Christian truth and Christian love, arising within the Christian mission by virtue of the human frailties of those who serve it. There is, of course, no final incompatibility between truth and love; but to speak the truth in love is an exacting vocation. It was pointed out that there is a sense in which the love of our neighbour, involving genuine respect for all that he is in his total personality, precludes the criticism that is implied in the fact of the mission itself. Would it not appear that the supremely Christian duty in the world today was not an uncompromising presentation of an exclusive faith, but rather the endeavour to enter sympathetically into the values in non-Christian religions and to foster reconciliation in terms of mutual forbearance? But can forbearance in any real sense go with doctrinal self-assertion? In other words is there a final dichotomy between the spirit of Jesus and the faith of the Church, between loving our human brethren and disallowing their traditional religion?

Against this fear—with which it is salutary to reckon—it was urged that Christian truth and love are only separately safe when they are properly together. There is no unloving implication in the conviction of the preaching Church. The Gospel is a tremendous positive, not a carping negative. Admittedly it judges, but it judges in order to save. And it judges all equally: to be its custodians is not to be personally censorious, nor yet personally superior. When served in the humility which alone is fitting, the Gospel does love's work in truth's way. We must of course beware eternally of any proprietary monopolizing of the inheritance of Christ which fulfills itself unpredictably where-ever it goes. We must re-

sist relentlessly the description of the Christian mission as 'foreign'. For where-ever it be it is at home. 'Foreign-ness' is a concept only existing by virtue of nationality. And nationality is precisely that which Christ transcends, surmounts and hallows in inclusiveness. Servants of that mission who fail there, are not only failing in love. They are failing in truth. Indeed in the last analysis all Christian failures are failures in both. It would be a false sentimentalizing of love to withhold in its name the fulness of Christ. It would be a false form of loyalty to truth to proclaim it in anything but the utmost respect for the minds and wills of those who hear.

A precise point at which the foregoing becomes an issue, it was stated, lies in the criticism provoked by some thinking Muslims of the active forms of Christian missionary ministry. The pressing needs of many Muslim lands arise from poverty, ignorance and disease. A characteristic form of Christian response has been medicine, hospitals, schools, clinics and rural welfare. This response has arisen from the fundamental Christian concern for people in their plight. Action has been made articulate by preaching. It has been explained that this activity of love is patterned on the love of God and energized by Christ's spirit and example, in obedience to His command. But it can look differently to those who are sensitively aware of their own social evils, embarrassed to find 'foreigners' tending them and suspicious of the fact that admittedly worth-while service is made the occasion of religious 'propaganda'. In its most outspoken forms, this criticism even suggests that a somewhat mean advantage is being taken of the weak, the needy and the ignorant. They are being exploited under pressure of kindness to become apostates to God and traitors to their land. Fantastic as the suspicion may sound, belied as it may be by decades of disinterested service, it none the less makes sense to many Muslims in the present temper of their world. No Christian of course will be intimidated out of ministry or paralysed by insinuation. But "let not thy good be evil spoken of" is an apostolic injunction. He must be sensitive

to every form of reaction and patient, giving no offense in anything. In any event these tasks are more and more passing to the local authorities—a very proper development. The Christian spirit will never lack means of expression. But it will rejoice in and unobtrusively assist the national campaigns against every form of human misery or privation. To the complaint that it is not 'disinterested' it must bring a new conception to its critics of what disinterestedness does and does not mean, always searching itself by the right criteria. As with Christ Himself so with His Church. The works of compassion were never grounds of allegiance but rather tokens of God and patterns of discipleship.

Turning from these basic questions of missionary relatedness, the Conference took up the study of actual Muslim-Christian contacts in this generation. It did so in terms of four general items:

(a) Christian-Muslim relations are inevitably mixed with other patterns of relationship—political, economic and social. It was strongly emphasized that the Christian mission, while in no sense contracting out of its Christian responsibility for its home countries, should none the less strenuously cleanse, and where it cannot cleanse, repudiate, all that by Christian standards is unworthy in the relationship of nations. It was felt, for example, that a Muslim who happened to be Egyptian and a Christian who happened to be British would find fruitful religious contact almost impossible unless there was frankness, penitence, forbearance and love concerning those facts which, otherwise, would dog their path. To achieve a genuine exchange of religious witness and experience over such hurdles calls for sensitivity, imagination and open-heartedness. If we covet these we must also offer them. This problem is more than the facile—and in the Muslim context deceptive—notion of the separation of "Church and State." It is rather a discrimination between the obedience of the spiritual man and the recalcitrance of the natural. Incidentally the second distinction is not so articulate in Islam, though the facts to warrant and suggest it are, properly interpreted, abundant.

(b) Christian-Muslim relations take place in the context of the actual world. It is in no sense a competition of religions in a vacuum. Rather the relevance and call of Christianity must be proclaimed against the background of those insistent problems which are the immediate concern of all earnest Muslims. Disease, inequality, graft, indifference, materialism, population pressures, religious decline, pride, bigotry, sin—only in the living context of what Muslims feel Islam itself should come to mean in view of these evils can the Gospel be proclaimed. Citizenship, family planning, attitudes to parenthood, democracy, responsibilities of property, the positive answer to Communism—all these, which exercise the Muslim mind itself, must be made to illuminate the nature of the personal revolution which Christianity proposes.

(c) Christian-Muslim relations ensue with Islam in a fluid state. Though well-defined and authoritarian, Islam is yet in process of re-definition. Muslims themselves are vigorously critical of the Islam that is, in the name of the Islam that ought to be. We must relate ourselves wisely and patiently to this process. It would be wrong to take up an attitude which condemned Islam to unchanging sameness. We must question whether we should even dispute interpretations which may be historically suspect, since they may be morally desirable. It is idle only to say in respect of even some romantic version: "This is not Islam." For in one sense Islam is what Muslims believe. If this leaves us still in need of a definition of 'the Muslim'—a need which sends us back in a circle to Islam—it is none the less they who must decide. The Christian aim must be rooted in hope and love, always striving to utter the relevance of Christ to just those issues which make the pregnant debate which goes on both in deed and word within Islam. Within this debate there are the contrasted groups, the conservatives and the progressives. Towards each our duty is clear; to minister Christ the truth, the guide in perplexity, the answer to the fear of the obscurantist, the challenge to all human self-confidence. Both the anchored and the unanchored have a claim upon us for a

sympathetic relating of Christian doctrine to their anxiety or hope.

(d) Finally we must concern ourselves with actual ways of achieving, in personal, intimate terms, this relationship between Christian and Muslim. It was agreed that the possibility of mutual worship, common prayer and study, could be much more widely explored. Groups in Istanbul, Cairo and Beirut have met together for frank and open exchange of experience and conviction. Why not in New York and elsewhere? The labor of knowing Islam is a duty well calculated to fructify the Christian witness. Where can we most truly pursue both, most fully know and be most fully known, than in friendship under the common burdens of this mid-Century? Such an intercourse would stimulate our expression of Christ to those also who refused to share it. It would serve two further obligations. We urgently need a new, virile, intimate Christian enterprise of writing for the Muslim world. We must attend more resolutely to the confusion of religious vocabulary in both Arabic and the languages of Indo-Pakistan.

But if the foregoing expects a new openness on the part at least of certain Muslims, how much does it also turn upon strong-calibred Christian apostleship, able to understand and discharge its trust with patient steadfastness and imaginative initiative. We must strive to proclaim the Christian vocation to this splendid but exacting business and equip for their calling those whom it fires. Alongsidedness must be our watchword. Can we take upon our minds and into our hearts the doubts which beset the earnest Muslim in the presence of Christianity? If we have often talked *to* Muslims, perhaps we have not sufficiently talked *with* them. There is a real sense in which every Christian is a 'muslim' (small 'm')—one who has submitted to the revelation of God in Christ. Our task is to relate that whole-hearted 'islam' of ours to the vast, historic, living Islam of our own bewildered time.

On this note the discussion turned inevitably into intercession and the seeking of the Holy Spirit. After prayer the Conference concluded.

